critical digest

VOL. IV No. 36 May 5, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Of Thee I Sing-Ziegfeld, 5/5/52. Chandler Cowles and Ben Segal present Jack Carson and Paul Hartman in revival of George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind musical comedy with lyrics by Ira Gershwin. Jack Whiting, Lenore Lonergan, Florenz Ames and Betty Oakes are featured. Directed by George S. Kaufman.

Digests of Current Reviews - late reviews on back page

Hook 'N Ladder-Royale, 4/29/52. Title to "worst play of season" has shifted from Collector's Item to present exhibit produced and staged by Al Moritz. Billed as farce comedy and authored by Charles Horner and Henry Miles, the daily critics could find few kind words to say about any of the elements. Many skipped mention of cast headed by Vicki Cummings as the kindest thing to do. Atkinson, Times, reported that George Jean Nathan left after the first act, and that another critic left after the second. Kerr, Herald Tribune, filed a definitive report including plot and sample gags. Chapman, News, thought comedy had to be seen to be disbelieved. Frantic but feeble is Coleman, Mirror, estimate, while Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, thought idea of trying to sell fire engine to small town politicos might be worth a short story or a one act comedy, but never a three act play. Watts, Post, is sure it takes a kind of horrible, sinister genius to write such a play without one funny sequence or line. McClain, Journal American, is trying to convince himself it was all just a nightmare, something that really didn't happen.

To Be Continued-Booth, 4/23/52. William Marchant was honored as a worth while new playwright of promise by the weekly reviewers, but most agreed that his present comedy fell apart in the third act. Super production of Donald Oenslager sets, Motley's costumes and Guthrie McClintic's direction of smooth cast headed by Dorothy Stickney, Luella Gear and Neil Hamilton wasted. Switch from comedy to moralizing in third act just isn't believable. Hobe, Variety, thought script might have mild possibilities in stock. Shipley, New Leader, noted idea was used in most French farces 60 years ago. WCBS Bill Leonard disagreed. Show turned out to be a fairly satisfactory evening, because it is written with grace and a good deal of wit. Unlike the other critics, the broadcaster believed the author wrote believable, real characters which he observed thoughtfully.

Candida-National, 4/22/52. Weekly appraisers joined their daily colleagues in panning Olivia de Havilland portrayal of Shaw character in revival produced by Thomas Hammond and staged by Herman Shumlin. Critics agreed that role escaped motion picture star completely. Variety critic noted that her performance had an unusual refreshingly youthful quality, which had nothing to do with the part. Francis, Billboard, never did like this particular Shaw play, but he found the current version extra dull. Time man didn't think de Havilland even tried the part on for size, while the script showed its age. Best thing in show, in opinion of Gabriel, Cue, was Oenslager set, while Gibbs, New Yorker, found production meaningless.

News & Notes

Shows that closed include Call Me Madam, Gigi suspends May 31st, to resume in October...The Shrike to close May 31st unless Jose Ferrer finds replacement for himself...Mrs. McThing added to shows with 7:00 PM Monday curtain...Barbara Baxley replaces Julie Harris in I Am A Camera...New Haven Railroad passengers to be polled on early curtain...Press agent Richard Maney discovered the Fulton Theatre celebrated its 41st birthday.

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' Cumulative NYC Ratings '

D - Daily W - Weekly M - Monthly B * Broadcast

DT - NY Times	DJC - Journal of Commerce	WCM - Chr. Science Monitor
DH - NY Herald Tribune	DWJ - Wall St. Journal	WC - Commonweal
DN - NY News	DWW - Women's Wear	WCU - Cue
DM - NY Mirror	WB - Billboard	WN - Nation
DC - NY Compass	WV - Variety	WNR - New Republic
DP - NY Post	WCD - Critical Digest	WNS - Newsweek
DJ - NY Journal American	WGN - George Jean Nathan	WNY - New Yorker
DW - NY World Telegram-Sun	WWM - Ward Morehouse	WSR - Saturday Review
DB - Brooklyn Eagle	BC - WCBS Bill Leonard	WT - Time
DL - L.I.Press	BL - New Leader-WEVD	MP - Park East

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51	PROS: 19	CON: DH DP WGN WWM BL WC WNY NONE: DWJ WN WNR WSR
GIGI-11/24/51	PROS: 18	CON: DT DM DC DP DW WWM BL WCM WCU WSR WT
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50	PROS: 29	CON: WN
I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51	PROS: 22	CON: DN DJ BL WCM WN WNR
THE KING AND I-3/29/51	PROS: 29	CON: WN
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51	PROS: 26	CON: WCD WGN NONE: WN MP
MRS. McTHING-2/20/52	PROS: 20	CON: DM DJ WGN BC BL WNY WSR WT NONE: WNR MP
PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51	PROS: 21	CON: DH DP DJ WV WWM BC WC NONE: WNR WSR
PAL JOEY-1/3/52	PROS: 28	CON: BL NONE: WNR
POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51	PROS: 25	CON: DW BL WN WNR WT
THE SHRIKE-1/15/52	PROS: 25	CON: DW WCD BC BL WN
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49	PROS: 29	CON: WT
STALAG 17-5/8/51	PROS: 22	CON: DM WCD BL WCU WN WNY SO-SO: DN
THREE WISHES FOR JAMIE-3/21/52	PROS: 18	CON: DT DP DJ WCM WCU WSR WT NONE: WWM WN WNR MP
TO BE CONTINUED-4/23/52	PROS: DP DJC BC	NONE: WGN WWM WCM WN WNR WNS WSR MP CON: DT DH DN DM DC DP DJ DW DL DWJ DWW WB WV WCD BC BL WC WCU WNS WNY WSR MP
TOP BANANA-11/1/51	PROS: 23	CON: DP DJ BL NONE: WCM WN WNR WSR

' Off Broadway '

Non-profit production of Sean O'Casey short plays postponed until May 7th at Yugoslav-American Hall, 405 West 41st Street. Plan to produce plays grew out of readings conducted by members of local progressive Irish society, reports Pollock, Compass. Actors formed own company to insure production. Seats will not be sold at door, but may be reserved by calling Lily Turner, CH 3-1848...Living Theatre's An Evening of Bohemian Theatre passed its 50th performance...American Lyric Theatre organized to present an Equity company in an off Broadway theatre...New Dramatists Committee accepting applications for participation in its activities. Applicants write Michaela O'Harra, 130 West 56th Street...Peter Frye bought Theodore Apstein's Illusion, the first play produced by New Dramatists Committee.

' Green Room Department '

ANTA ALBUM IDEAS...Though an ANTA Album probably won't be produced this year, Morehouse, WT&S, is all ready with a program for a super $100 a seat evening if ANTA ever asks him for same. Entertainment would include Julie Harris in a scene from Rain, the Lunts in a scene from Macbeth, Ralph Bellamy in a scene from The Great Divide, Katharine Cornell reciting speech from Alien Corn, Audrey Hepburn in a scene from Peg O' My Heart, Katherine Hepburn as Portia, and Helen Hayes in a scene from The Shanghai Gesture. Evening would end with minstrel show starring Fred Allen, Eddie Cantor, Lou Holtz, Bert Lahn and Phil Silvers.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...New plays and new hits only benefit from 7:00 PM Monday curtain, comments McCord, Herald Tribune on closing of Jane in spite of early curtain test...Current products of theatre seem more likely to kill the critics than vice versa, complains Watts, Post...Pulitzer prize committee best American play choice, due Monday, will give the judges trouble because James Michener hasn't written anything, predicts Sylvester, News.

ADD PUN'S FUN...Latest crop of capsule critiques by Phillips, WT&S, include I Am A Camera - Guys and Julie...Mrs. McThing - Three Witches for Helen...The Shrike - Spouse Anti-pacific...The Chase - The Sheriff and I.

MAIL BOX...NY theatre audiences rated quieter and more courteous than London theatre goers by "Theatre" reader..."Equity" magazine reports no actors responded to critics charges that casts of panned plays lose interest in play..."Playbill" urged to provide space for customers' suggestions by Times reader.

ADVICE TO OLIVIA...Unanimously the critics praised the determination and courage of Olivia de Havilland in facing NY audiences and critics for second time. Kenneth Banghart, subbing for Leon Pearson on NBC Critic at Large, suggests the actress face the facts of life and undergo extensive theatre training under a good coach. Chapman, News, advises the Hollywood star to take it easy and not fight so hard. The best acting he reminds her, is the reflection of the warmth of the audience.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Discussion of academic freedom in The Male Animal was almost rewritten to bring it up to date, Elliott Nugent told Rice, Post, but it was decided to keep the play in "period."...Porgy and Bess is the only true American opera with the richness and complex music you expect from opera, John Raitt, Three Wishes for Jamie, told Sheaffer, Eagle. Five NY hits and no unemployment since she took up the theatre trade is the enviable record Stephanie Augustine, The King and I, detailed to Morehouse, WT&S.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Howard Lindsay succeeds Robert E. Sherwood as national chairman of Council of Living Theatre...Rodgers and Hammerstein plan Broadway musical repertory of their past hits for 1953...Francis, Billboard, spoke on "Drama Critic Faces His Audience" at NY Council of English teachers...Cornelia Otis Skinner will take Paris '90 to Paris next fall...Joseph Heidt, Theatre Guild press agent, to operate theatre in round at Teaneck, NJ this summer...Donaldson Award Committee includes Watts, Post, Vivienne Segal, Myron McCormick, Jule Styne, Jerome Robbins, Alfred Harding, Ben Irving, Oliver Sayler, John Effrat, Morrie Seamon, John McDowell and Stewart Cheney. Winners of balloting to be announced in June...Women of Twilight treble damage suit of $120,000 filed by producers against stage designers union for forcing show to close. Union claims bad reviews, not their picketing, caused the flop...New version of The Rivals playing at Provincetown...Dramatic Workshop production of A Midsummer Night's Dream panned by McDonald, Billboard, as inept and amateurish.

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' Drama Desk Meets Hollywood Star & Producer '

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Unusual points of view on Broadway critics, audiences and theatre production expressed by Drama Desk's guests at April meeting of NYC drama reporters and editors group. Olivia de Havilland, Candida star, Thomas Hammond, Candida producer, Lester Cowan, producer of "Main Street to Broadway" film and Jean Dalrymple, coordinator of film, answered questions.

Though NYC drama critics brutally panned current production of Candida, de Havilland explained that show, which has been touring to sell out houses for almost seven months, came back to its usual stride by the first Saturday performance. Star and cast were at loss to explain what happened opening night in New York, but the audience reaction was different than any they had met in their travels. During this tour the cast had come to expect a warm audience reaction with expected laughs in their proper places. But the NYC opening night audience simply wouldn't respond. Hollywood actress is sure drama critics will agree if they revisit the production. Cast was relieved, de Havilland said, when she told them she was importing a Richmond, Virginia, audience for the Saturday performance.

"Love" is what induced the motion picture actress to give up the movies for the stage, she answered. Her first love had been theatre but thanks to a seven year contract her dreams had been sidetracked. But she was determined to go back. Actress believes that most people forget about the dreams of their youth as they grow older. She may make a motion picture this summer, but next fall will return to the stage.

Council of Living Theatre will receive 20 to 40 percent of profits of the Main Street to Broadway film, Cowan explained. It is a regular commercial release, with a fiction story by Samson Raphaelson, adapted from an original story by Robert E. Sherwood. Many Broadway actors, producers and critics will play themselves in scenes in the picture. Hollywood producer sees this picture as first step of cooperative promotion between motion picture and theatre industries. A group of motion picture theatre owners have formed the company to produce the film which will show the glamor and importance of the living theatre.

Cowan predicted that in the not too far distant future many films will be tested by theatre production and many plays will be sponsored by film companies who want the motion picture rights of the given show. Under his scheme, which he plans to put in practice himself, the motion picture producer would save money by testing his material in theatre form, using the same cast he planned to use in the film. It is hoped that the film will be released in January 1953. A National Theatre Week promotion with openings in 50 cities is being planned.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '

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The Male Animal-City Center 3/30/52. Rave notices filed by all daily critics on limited run opener of spring comedy season of NYC Theatre Company. Thurber-Nugent minor classic, staged by Michael Gordon, and starring co-author Elliott Nugent in his original role won plaudits in all departments. Most agreed with Atkinson,Times, who rated show funniest of the season. They also felt that comedy drama of academic life was even more timely than it was in 1940. Only McClain,Journal American, found the plot a bit off base. Kerr,Herald Tribune, was over joyed with the large doses of pure Thurber to be found in the script. Robert Preston, Matt Briggs, Martha Scott and rest of supporting cast shared praise. Nugent's daughter, Nancy, also was applauded. Chapman,News, feels it is a pity that production is scheduled for just 16 performances. Watts,Post,noted that show, unlike most the group has been doing, fits very comfortably into the large house. Without mentioning names, most critics were convinced that this 12 year old gem is much funnier than anything written and produced in 1952.